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EXDIS

LONDON FOR CODEL PERCY

E.O. 12065: RDS-4 1/20/02 (DILLON, ROBERT S) OR-M
 TAGS: OREP (PERCY, CHARLES H)
 SUBJ: CODEL PERCY: MEETING WITH CAMILLE CHAMOUN, PIERRE GEMAYEL
 AND BASHIR GEMAYEL

1. (C-ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SENATOR PERCY, ACCOMPANIED BY AMBASSADOR DILLON, MET
 FOR AN HOUR JANUARY 20 WITH LEBANESE FRONT PRESIDENT
 CAMILLE CHAMOUN, PHALANGE CHIEF PIERRE GEMAYEL AND
 LEBANESE FORCES COMMANDER BASHIR GEMAYEL. CHAMOUN AND
 THE GEMAYELS WERE ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY CONCERNED WITH THE
 SYRIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON. CHAMOUN BEGAN BY STATING
 THAT THE SYRIAN ARMY WAS AN ARMY OF OCCUPATION, NOT A
 PEACE-KEEPING FORCE, AND THAT IF THEY SYRIANS REMAINED IN
 LEBANON THROUGH THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, THEY WOULD

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ATTEMPT TO IMPOSE A PUPPET PRESIDENT. THIS WOULD MEAN THE END OF A FREE AND INDEPENDENT LEBANON AS WELL AS A MAJOR GAIN FOR SOVIET INFLUENCE. CHAMOUN AND PIERRE GEMAYEL ALSO MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

--THE SYRIANS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEADLOCK IN THE ARAB FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE, AND NEITHER THE SAUDIS NOR OTHER MODERATE ARABS HAVE HAD ANY INFLUENCE ON DAMASCUS.

--THE SYRIANS REFUSE TO SAY EXACTLY WHAT THEY WANT FROM THE LEBANESE, THEREBY MAKING IT IMPOSSIBLE TO EVEN DISCUSS TERMS FOR A SYRIAN DEPARTURE.

--SYRIA HOPES THE IRAQ-IRAN WAR WILL CONTINUE BECAUSE IT IS DAMAGING IRAQ.

PIERRE ALSO REITERATED AT LENGTH HIS BELIEF THAT THE SYRIAN GOAL OF DOMINATING AND ABSORBING LEBANON IN FACT REPRESENTS A COMMUNIST SCHEME TO GAIN INFLUENCE IN THE AREA.

3. CHAMOUN AND THE GEMAYELS ATTACHED LITTLE IMPORTANCE TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM. CHAMOUN STATED FRANKLY THAT THIS IS A SECONDARY ISSUE TO THE LEBANESE FRONT, WHICH IS IN NO PARTICULAR HURRY TO GET THE PALESTINIANS OUT. THE REAL PROBLEM, HE STRESSED REPEATEDLY, IS THE SYRIAN PRESENCE. CHAMOUN SAID THAT IF THE PLO HAD FREEDOM OF CHOICE, IT WOULD PROBABLY BE PREPARED TO RECOGNIZE ISRAEL IN RETURN FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOME FORM OF PALESTINIAN STATE. HOWEVER, ARAB HARDLINERS (HE MENTIONED SYRIA, THE PDRY AND IRAQ), BACKED BY THE SOVIET UNION, HAVE PREVENTED ARAFAT FROM MOVING IN THIS DIRECTION. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION FROM SENATOR PERCY AS TO WHETHER THE US SHOULD PLAY A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN ATTEMPTING TO BRING ABOUT A SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM, PIERRE PROVIDED A LENGTHY AND SOMEWHAT CONFUSED ASSERTION THAT THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM IS ESSENTIALLY A PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM AND FANATICISM AND AS SUCH MAY NEVER BE SOLVED.

4. BOTH CHAMOUN AND BASHIR SAID THEY HOPED FOR AN EX-

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PANDED US ROLE IN LEBANON. CHAMOUN SAID HE HOPED THE US COULD GET THE SYRIANS OUT OF LEBANON BEFORE THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, AND BASHIR SAID THAT THE US SHOULD SUPPORT THE LEBANESE FRONT, IN ORDER TO PREVENT SYRIA, WITH COMMUNIST AID, FROM DESTROYING LEBANON.

5. CHAMOUN AND THE GEMAYELS MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY DID NOT SHARE TRADITIONAL ARAB CONCERNS WITH THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION AND THE US-ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP. WHEN SENATOR PERCY ASKED WHAT ARAB REACTION WOULD BE TO A US DECISION TO REINSTATE THE MOU AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE, THE RESPONSE WAS (A) THE PALESTINIANS ARE NOT THE LEBANESE FRONT'S PROBLEM AND (B) WHAT THE LEBANESE FRONT WOULD REALLY LIKE IS THE SAME RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US THAT ISRAEL HAS: "WE WOULD BE JUST AS GOOD FRIENDS AS ISRAEL IS, AND WE WOULD BE CHEAPER."

6. PIERRE AND CHAMOUN DID MOST OF THE TALKING, WHILE BASHIR PLAYED THE ROLE OF THE DUTIFUL YOUNGER SON, TRANSLATING FOR HIS FATHER AND SELDOM OFFERING VIEWS OF HIS OWN. HOWEVER, ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS HE BECAME VISIBLY IMPATIENT WITH PIERRE'S RAMBLING MONOLOGUES.

DILLON

END OF MESSAGE

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